

COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE WARM HOMES PLAN

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTH WEST REGION ENERGY ADVICE PROVIDERS FORUM

BACKGROUND

The South West Net Zero Hub invited the National Retrofit Hub to convene the South West Region Energy Advice Providers Forum to develop a collective response to the Warm Homes Plan published in January 2026. What follows is the synthesis of the insight gathered following workshops and feedback opportunities with members of the SWNZH and the Forum.

PURPOSE

This paper sets out the collective response by the South West Region Energy Advice Providers Forum¹ (the Forum) to the Government's Warm Homes Plan (WHP).

The Forum, hosted by the Southwest Net Zero Hub (SWNZH), urges the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to work in close partnership with it to help define and shape the role of the Warm Homes Agency, with a particular focus on the provision of advice. The Forum brings a breadth of experience and practical insight into what works, and what does not, when advising households across all tenures on energy efficiency, decarbonised heat, and retrofit.

Meaningful collaboration with the Forum via the SWNZH presents a critical opportunity to accelerate uptake of the Warm Homes Plan's offers. The difference between successful delivery and missed ambition lies in a core asset embedded within the Forum's networks: trust. Leveraging this trusted position will be essential to delivering the Warm Homes Plan effectively and at scale.

CONTEXT

The publication of the WHP sets out an ambitious programme stating it will "deliver £15 billion of public investment to upgrade up to 5 million homes and lift up to a million families out of fuel poverty by 2030. It includes an offer for everyone"²

The Forum has identified four specific areas within the Plan that demonstrate the region's strengths and clearly show why partnership with the Department is essential. Those four areas are:

¹ See appendix for details of Forum members and reach

² DESNZ, Warm Homes Plan, 2026, page 10

1. Advice consensus and leadership
2. Health integration
3. Place-based delivery
4. A strong regional partner in the SWNZH

1. PLACE-BASED DELIVERY

The WHP sets out the importance of “Strategic area-based coordination” and states that “Planning for strategic, area-based coordination to ensure we make the most of opportunities and that our grid keeps pace with the rate of change required.”³

It is well understood and evidenced across the energy and retrofit advice space that area-based coordination is part of taking a place-based approach to developing strategies for retrofit delivery. Though coordination with grid capacity is crucial, ensuring uptake of measures identified in the WHP will require delivery through trusted intermediaries; therefore, greater emphasis and support should be directed toward developing and sustaining these actors.

In addition to this, the South West experience demonstrates that place-based delivery requires a neutral convening body that is close enough to understand local delivery conditions, but sufficiently regional to join up fragmented schemes, funding streams and partnerships. The Hub model provides this missing middle layer between national policy and hyper-local delivery.

WHAT WORKS WELL

From the experience of decades of delivery, the Forum notes that successful place-based coordination requires the following:

- Strong collaborative infrastructure
 - Evident in the South West region through long established networks with broad reach, regular cooperation between advice providers, and proven multi-organisation collaborative, and crucially, flexible delivery approaches
- Effective delivery models
 - The Forum members operate both integrated and varied services combining fuel poor household energy advice, wellbeing in the home advice, with retrofit services
 - Supply chains actively mobilised through a range of programmes including CSE’s Futureproof, Retrofit West and PEC’s HUG/LAD/WHLG programmes

³ DESNZ, Warm Homes Plan, 2026, page 82

- Local authority partnerships
 - Best practice examples of working relationships with LAs (notably Southampton) on fuel poverty, health, and energy efficiency activities, Forum members are enabled to explore diverse partnering structures
- A strong impartial regional Hub
 - The SWNZ Hub acts as the strategic bridge between SW delivery and DESNZ. It convenes local authorities, trusted advice providers, community energy organisations, health partners, housing providers, suppliers and central government around shared delivery frameworks and existing grant programmes.
 - SWNZ Hub provides strategic coordination, governance, evidence base, consistency and the escalation routes needed to allow diverse local models to develop safely and effectively. This includes supporting LEAD - which tested place-based approaches, shared learning, aligned advice with grant delivery, and ensured it was possible for local insight to inform national policy design.

WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION

The region's activity generates fundamental insights into where stronger support and coordination are required to achieve successful place-based delivery. Such areas include simplifying partnership coordination and creating consistent funding conditions. There is significant concern about the damage to the local supply chain through inconsistent and episodic policy and the delivery models that respond to it.

A more nuanced approach is required to distinguish between area-based grid planning and the devolution of power and resources to local authorities, and understanding of the actors required to realise place-based approaches that can build consumer confidence and support local supply chains.

THE ASK

With regard to place-based approaches to retrofit, the following is required:

- Clarity: What is in and out of scope for place-based approaches to delivering the WHP?
- How will area-based schemes interact with community energy initiatives?
- What is being done to ensure public procurement is leveraged to actively grow and support local supply chains with clear social value criteria?
- Experience highlights the need for regional advice hubs. Will the Warm Homes Agency ensure there are regional Warm Homes Hubs, and that they will build on the already strong Net Zero Hubs?

The Forum urges the government to engage to ensure that such insight and experience can be leveraged to contribute to the realisation of robust delivery infrastructure for the Warm Homes Plan.

2. HEALTH INTEGRATION

The publication of the WHP sets out an ambitious programme of works to enable “action, to bring down the cost of living, improve our energy security, cut fuel poverty and the associated impacts it has on our nation’s health and wellbeing, and address the climate crisis” ⁴

There is no question of the alignment of the goals of the WHP and better health outcomes for households. However, to put this into practice, key areas must be addressed. These include:

- Partnerships backed by senior leadership
- National best practice guidance to support the creation of partnerships between health agencies and institutions and local energy advice providers
- Policy and practice feedback loops

WHAT WORKS WELL

There is extensive experience with significant success case studies across the Forum members that showcase the integration of health and energy advice provision, that can then subsequently lead to interventions in homes to improve both the health and comfort outcomes of residents. These include guidance documents, knowledge programmes, as well as integration with referral schemes.

**Winter
Wellbeing
Guide**

**Healthy
Homes Dorset**

**Community
Wellbeing Hub**

**Somerset
Social
Housing**

Click the boxes above for case study information including the Cornwall Winter Wellbeing Partnership, which has been active for over 12 years, Healthy Homes Dorset, the Community Wellbeing Hub in Bath and North East Somerset, and Social Housing Upgrades programme in Somerset.

WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION

Some key focus areas that require clarity and improvement include:

⁴ DESNZ, Warm Homes Plan, 2026, page 13

- Grant scheme limitations: Current grant-led schemes fail to incentivise interventions that may have the most significant health impacts, particularly repair costs needed prior to addressing cold homes, damp and mould.
- Resource efficiency: Diversity in approach and lack of capacity building support leads to inefficient resource use, putting community organisations at a disadvantage compared to large commercial operators.
- Health funding access: Significant challenges remain in securing health sector funding and establishing clear coordination mechanisms for health partnerships.

THE ASK

Approaches to integrating health and energy advice are not commonly understood across the UK so guidance on adopting best practice is needed.

- Implement a "fast follower" approach enabling community groups to adopt proven practices rather than reinventing solutions, requiring longer-term place-based funding and capacity building support.

Furthermore, enhanced data sharing is needed to ensure the most impactful advice and subsequent interventions can be delivered.

- Enable better data sharing across organisations (public health, energy, etc.) to target support more effectively, following models like the DAFNEA project sharing data with NHS England.

Finally, empower those in senior leadership roles to enable partnerships involving multi-agency collaboration.

- Senior backing of partnerships between public health, housing, and sustainability teams and organisations is fundamental to ensuring momentum and success over the long term.

3. ADVICE CONSENSUS AND LEADERSHIP

High-quality local energy advice is essential to tackling both fuel poverty and the retrofit of homes at scale. The Forum members define advice as “two-way communication, distinguishing it from information, promotional activities, or education. It is contextual, relational and bespoke – not simply information provision or digital content delivery.” This is crucial because it highlights one of the most important elements of successful advice delivery – trust.

WHAT WORKS WELL

Trust exists where relationships are built over time, where communication is relatable, and where communities know that their best interests are top of the

agenda for those providing the advice. The following are areas that the Forum members already excel at providing:

- Community engagement excellence: Successful strong local relationships and trust through non-commercial approaches, leveraging channels like Parish Council newsletters and WhatsApp groups that commercial providers cannot access effectively.
- Accessible communication: Demonstrated skill in using lay terminology that resonates with people, focusing on outcomes rather than technical “measures” often used to describe retrofit.
- Integrated service delivery: Effectively combined fuel poverty advice, retrofit guidance, and cost of living support, with strong triaging systems to identify diverse citizen needs.

WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION

Trusted interactions are often understood as hyper local connections, and though this is true, through the active practice of collaboration, the potential of networked advice providers to reach far and wide across a geographic area is possible, and indeed exists in the South West region.

However, in order to scale this model, the Forum suggests:

- Development of a standard advice framework that can be adapted to reflect local need. This will build trust and consensus at the national scale, while delivering locally relevant detailed advice.
- Consolidate and make readily available learnings from previous demonstrator programmes (such as the LEAD – Local Energy Advice Demonstrator)
- Pilot a regional advice agency. This can then be expanded to operate a national advice service, leveraging the network's proven approach.

THE ASK

The Forum reiterates its invitation for DESNZ to engage directly to maximise on the decades of experience in multi-agency and stakeholder collaboration that is active across the region.

This draft response sets out the South West Energy Advice Providers Forum’s strong case for partnering via the SWNZH with government to deliver the Warm Homes Plan. Given the urgency and scale of need it is responsible and pertinent to work with the existing advice infrastructure in the region, and the associated brand recognition locally. Drawing on decades of trusted, place-based experience, it highlights how collaboration on local delivery, health

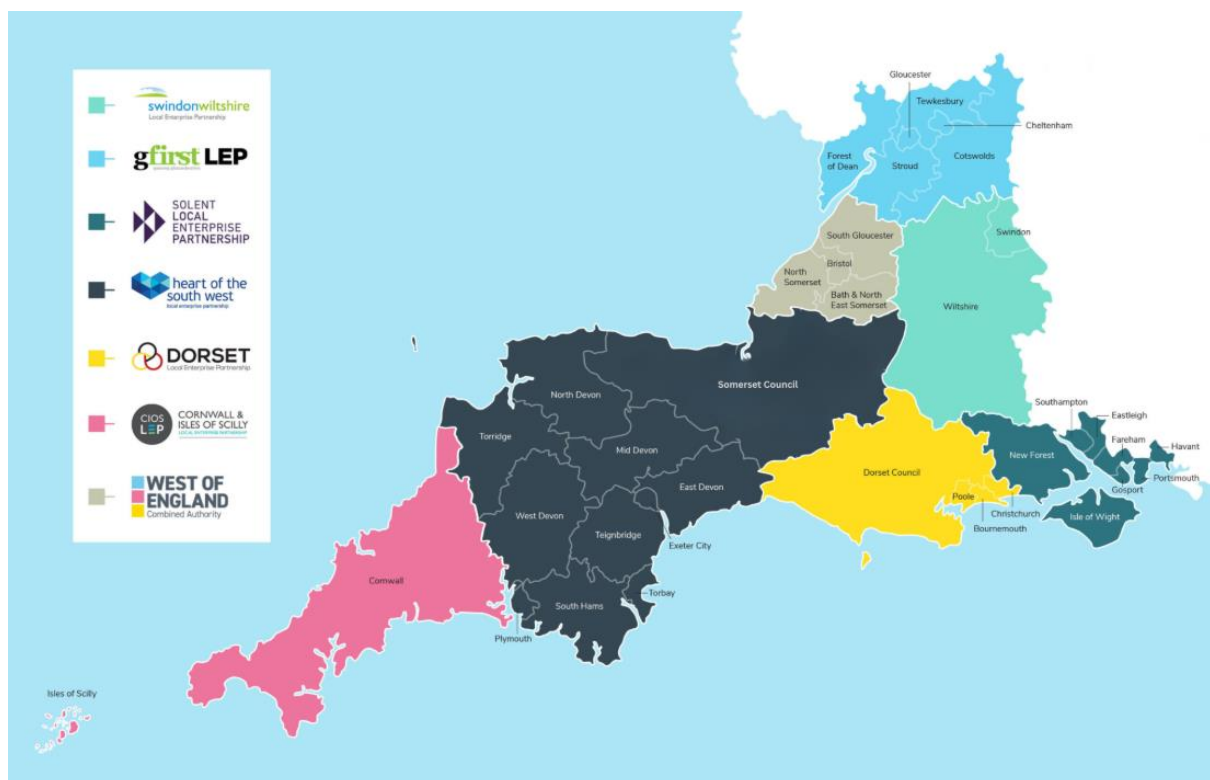
integration and high-quality energy advice is critical to achieving scale, public trust and lasting impact.

APPENDIX

WHO IS THE SOUTH WEST ENERGY ADVICE FORUM

The South West of England is home to 5.89 million people. The South West Energy Advice Forum secretariat is held by the South West Net Zero Hub. The following organisations form the core membership of the Forum and represent the region's leading locally rooted advice providers:

- Bath & West Community Energy
- Centre for Sustainable Energy (Bristol / Somerset / Wiltshire)
- Community Energy Plus – (Cornwall)
- Plymouth Energy Community
- Ridgewater Energy (Dorset)
- Severn Wye Energy Agency
- Sustainable Community Solutions t/a ECOE Advice (Devon)
- The Environment Centre (tEC) (Hampshire / Southampton / Portsmouth)





COMMUNITY
ENERGY PLUS

ecoe
advice



Centre for
Sustainable
Energy

tec the Environment
Centre (*tec*)



Cornwall Home Upgrade Hub
Retrofit Innovation



Great British
ENERGY
South West
NET ZERO
HUB



severn wye

green
Isle of Wight



my home
made better



Bath & West
Community
Energy



**Retrofit
West**



Tamar Energy
Community



Plymouth Energy
COMMUNITY